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Approved For Release 2003/06/13 : CIA-RDP80T00942A001200040001-7

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Nicaragua's Sandinista National Liberation Front

A Research Paper

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PA 79-10271
June 1979

Approved For Release 2003/06/13 : CIA-RDP80T00942A001200040001-7

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*Information as of 14 June 1979 has been used
in preparing this report.*

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Nicaragua's Sandinista National Liberation Front

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Introduction

This memorandum provides basic information on the Sandinista National Liberation Front—its organization, leadership, factions, foreign support, manpower, and policies.

Background

In the early 1960s the remnants of several revolutionary organizations formed, with Cuban support, the Sandinista National Liberation Front (FSLN). After two small invasion attempts from Honduras, the group settled into a pattern of predominantly rural operations by scattered bands, with occasional urban actions. Prior to the events of the past year, the FSLN's most spectacular success was the capture of a Government Minister's house in December 1974. The guerrillas exchanged high-ranking hostages for 14 fellow guerrillas, a large ransom, and safe passage to Cuba. During 1975 and 1976 government counterinsurgency efforts put the FSLN on the defensive.

During this low point the guerrillas fell into factional squabbles that have persisted to the present. Three groups emerged in 1976. A temporary alliance was achieved in October 1977, and the guerrillas staged a series of impressive attacks. Although the loose alliance fell apart shortly afterward, the guerrillas still consider their strikes of October 1977—and not the murder of opposition martyr Pedro Joaquin Chamorro in January 1978—to be the beginning of the present anti-Somoza struggle.

non-Marxists. Most of the high-ranking leaders have had personal association with Marxist groups, but play down their political views to attract a wider following. The Terciaros' primary differences with other factions are over military strategy. They seek to foment as soon as possible a national popular insurrection to overthrow President Somoza and his power structure.

FSLN, Popular Prolonged War (GPP)

This faction is more orthodox in its Marxism-Leninism and has close ties to Cuba. It favors a classic guerrilla military campaign in the mountains to develop a revolutionary army. Although not opposed to insurrection—GPP leaders felt morally obliged to join the offensive last September despite misgivings about the timing—this faction believes the struggle must be a lengthy war of attrition to undermine the Guard while building the confidence of the populace. Many GPP leaders believe that Somoza's continuation in office assists them in galvanizing the masses.

FSLN, Proletarian Tendency (TP)

The TP is the most doctrinaire Communist faction and emphasizes political organization and indoctrination in the labor, student, urban poor, and campesino sectors. It favors radicalizing the populace in preparation for an "armed insurrection of the masses." Although its leaders speak in terms of mountain guerrilla warfare, the faction seems most active on urban fronts. Like the GPP, the TP takes a longer view of the struggle and sees advantage in Somoza's perpetuation in power.

FSLN Factions

The three primary factions of the FSLN currently are:

FSLN, Terciaro

Some Terciaro leaders prefer to call their group "Insurreccional." This faction is the least doctrinaire and contains, especially among the rank and file, many

At the fighting level, differences over ideology and strategy may not be as significant because much of the rank and file is probably motivated chiefly by a desire to oust President Somoza. Except for university students, most youths who are enlisting in the guerrilla cause these days may be unaware of the political or strategic orientation of the group they join. As the Front gains in experience, sophistication, and organization, however, the lines could become more sharply drawn. [REDACTED]

some guerrillas—particularly those of the GPP—attempted to attack a few processing plants and stocks of crops to disrupt exports and deprive the government of badly needed foreign exchange. Only harvested crops were targeted, in order not to alienate the campesinos who depend on wages earned during the harvests. Last fall the FSLN boasted of its intention to destroy the National Guard, but fearing that this threat may steel the Guard's resolve, Sandinista leaders have more recently sought to induce desertion with promises of good treatment. [REDACTED]

Because its ultimate military success may depend on broad public support, the FSLN has good cause not to highlight the extent to which its political philosophy is influenced by Marxist ideology. Publicly, FSLN leaders claim to have democratic objectives and assert that it is not possible to establish "another Cuba" in Nicaragua. Leaders from all three factions seem to believe that even if Somoza were overthrown, the FSLN might not immediately place its leaders in power. [REDACTED]

Consequently, last fall the FSLN factions publicly supported the idea of a provisional government under the Group of 12—influential Nicaraguan professional and businessmen who have been closely associated with the guerrillas. Later the Sandinistas approved a provisional triumvirate: Sergio Ramirez of the Group of 12, Rafael Cordova Rivas of the Broad Opposition Front, and Alfonso Robelo of the private sector Nicaraguan Democratic Movement. [REDACTED]

While numerous opposition groups might be brought into a provisional government, the FSLN probably would consolidate political control through its front group, the United People's Movement (MPU) and the larger, more diverse National Patriotic Front (FPN). The MPU is composed of extremist student groups, small Communist political factions, and representatives of the two orthodox Marxist FSLN factions, the GPP and TP. The Teciaros are also loosely connected through a youth group, but unlike the GPP and TP factions, do not have a representative on the governing body. [REDACTED]

To date, there has been little progress in extending unity below the national leadership level. During periods of major fighting, such as the current offensive, the factions tend to overlook their differences and join in the campaign, although military action by the various groups is not very well coordinated. When an offensive or major joint operation fails and factions begin blaming each other, divisiveness returns. [REDACTED]

Presently the FSLN is probably more divided over strategy and personal differences than ideology. Nicaraguan Communists, whether guerrillas or political leaders, are split over doctrine, and if the war against Somoza is won, those differences can be expected to intensify. Since the death of Carlos Fonseca Amador in 1976, the FSLN guerrillas have not had a single leader. Tomas Borge, national directorate member and GPP leader, may have the stature to fill that void some time in the future, but it presently appears unlikely. Eden Pastora—the widely publicized "Commander Zero" of the National Palace operation—does not have much influence in the organization. [REDACTED]

Policies and Programs

Despite differences over strategy, all FSLN factions seem to agree on certain military tactics. By assassinating Somoza supporters and informers and engaging in other terrorist actions, the guerrillas hope to provoke the Guard into greater repression, leading to increased public antagonism toward Somoza and the Guard. Last spring, following the cotton and coffee harvests,

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The published program of the MPU is probably the most coherent public expression of FSLN political policies. It represents the public views of the GPP and TP factions, and it is almost identical to a Terciario pamphlet issued some time later. It calls for:

- Unity of all "progressive" anti-Somoza forces.
- Abolition of repressive laws and amnesty for all who opposed the Somoza regime.
- Expropriation of Somoza family property; nationalization of natural resources and related industries and transportation; price controls; national economic plan to coordinate private industry and the state economic sector to achieve social progress; tax reform; state control of banking; renegotiation of foreign debt; direction of private business into sectors not conflicting with national or collective interests; regulation of foreign and domestic commerce to redistribute the wealth in order to guarantee all Nicaraguans the basic necessities.
- Agrarian reform; abolition of latifundia; conversion of Somoza family property to cooperatives and state enterprises; emphasis on production of basic foods; loans and technical assistance to farmers.
- Labor reform and jobs for all; more schools and teachers, and education for all; social medicine for all; housing for all.
- Formation of a national army with participation by those National Guardsmen who actively oppose the Somoza government. [REDACTED]

Some FSLN propaganda last fall indicated the Front would annul all treaties approved during the Somoza dynasty, but more recently Tomas Borge has asserted publicly that the FSLN would respect Nicaragua's international agreements. He said the FSLN would also respect the International Monetary Fund (IMF) obligations, but would renegotiate the foreign debt. Radio Sandino has reported that the FSLN favors Nicaraguan membership in the movement of nonaligned nations. [REDACTED]

Borge has said the FSLN favors maintaining relations with all countries, including the United States. The Sandinistas, however, have consistently denounced the United States as the clearest example of monopolistic capitalism. Guerrilla propaganda asserts that Somoza is simply a servant of US imperialism; that the United States created Somozism, trains Somoza's elite troops, buttresses his regime, and directs his policies, all to further US economic interests. All elements of the FSLN publicly opposed the US-sponsored mediation effort last fall, contending that they would fight on even if the United States replaced Somoza, because the US intent would simply be to protect its economic interests. [REDACTED]

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Foreign and Domestic Support

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[REDACTED] the FSLN had 3,000 to 4,000 combatants in Nicaragua, and others in Costa Rica and Honduras; this figure is probably close to the mark. Guerrilla losses during the current offensive have probably been offset through more successful recruitment. As time passes and the Guard and government alienate more Nicaraguans, the reserve of potential manpower for the FSLN can be expected to grow. [REDACTED]

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It is impossible to determine the extent of popular support for the Sandinistas. The vast majority of the population is probably sympathetic to the Front because it is perceived to be the *only* group actively challenging the Somoza government. To date this sympathy has not translated into significant active support. Instead the majority of the population is intimidated and not sufficiently convinced of the FSLN's military capability or the Guard's imminent defeat to take up arms. [REDACTED]

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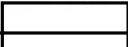

During guerrilla occupation of towns and neighborhoods, many young men and women join the Sandinistas in the streets. Others may reluctantly go along when the guerrillas depart out of fear that when the Guard reenters guerrilla-held areas, it will execute young men for suspected collaboration. [REDACTED]

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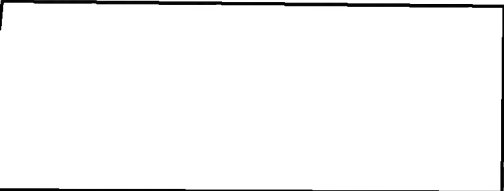
The four critical elements of the FSLN's foreign support are:

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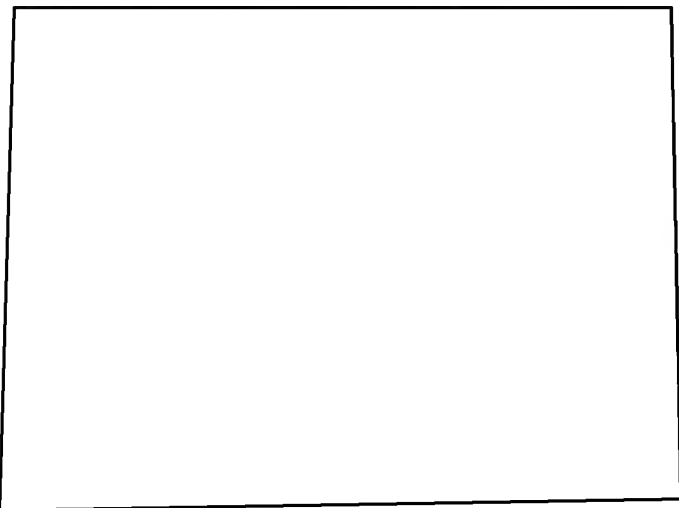
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- *Sanctuaries*, primarily in Costa Rica and secondarily in Honduras. The Honduran Government periodically contests Sandinista use of its territory. 
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- *Arms*, coming primarily from Cuba and perhaps the international market, and secondarily from Panama. We have no information on the total volume of materiel the FSLN has acquired from Cuba and from purchases. 

Last fall it appeared the Venezuelans were the FSLN's chief foreign supplier, but now the Cubans seem to have taken up the slack caused by the change of government in Caracas. Former President Perez, however, may still be assisting the guerrillas. The Panamanian Government also has supplied arms—some purchased in the United States—but probably lacks the resources of Cuba or Venezuela.



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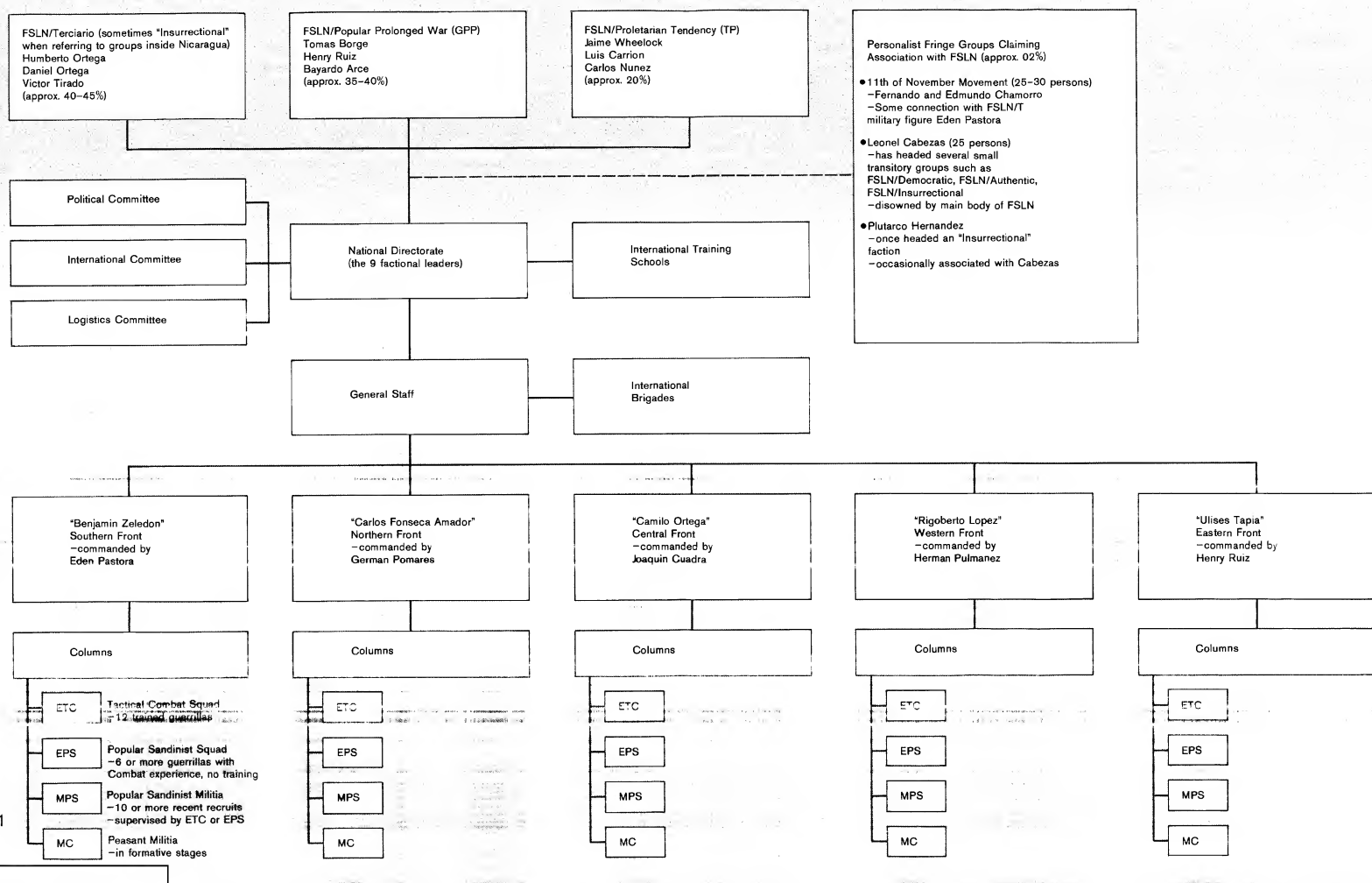
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